

Genealogical Research Summary

The 1835 Baptism of Anne Beegan • St. Columban's Parish, Cornwall, Ontario

Subject:	Anne Beegan (Later Gaffey) — Birth & Baptism Record Analysis
Source Repository:	Gabriel Drouin Collection (Ontario Catholic Church Records, 1802–1967)
Parish / Location:	St. Columban's Roman Catholic Church, Cornwall, Ontario, Canada
Document Ref:	Volume: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials (1834–1838), Page 37

This research dossier compiles a comprehensive transcription, paleographical analysis, and deep contextual historical investigation into the November 1835 baptismal record of **Anne Beegan**. This vital record serves as a primary foundational anchor linking the early Irish immigrant diaspora in Upper Canada to the subsequent settlement patterns tracked through the midwestern United States.

1. Paleographical Transcription

The following layout details a precise, line-by-line transcription of the handwritten cursive text entered into the parish registry ledger by the officiating clergyman.

SECTION	LITERAL TEXT TRANSCRIPTION
Header (Top of Page)	<i>Novr. — — 1835.</i> (Page notation: 37)
Left Margin Margin Notes	<i>Anne Stewart Beegan</i>
Main Record Entry	<i>Novr. 22nd 1835; Baptized by me the undersigned Clergyman, Anne being ten days old and legitimate child of Patrick Beegan and Bridget Beegan Sponsors Neil Stewart and Anne Stewart</i>
Officiant Signature	<i>James P. Bennett M. Pt.</i>

Clean Modern Reading

"November 22nd, 1835: Baptized by me, the undersigned Clergyman, Anne, being ten days old and the legitimate child of Patrick Beegan and Bridget Beegan. Sponsors: Neil Stewart and Anne Stewart. Officiant: James P. Bennett, Missionary Priest."

2. Critical Genealogical Analysis

Exact Birth Date Calculation

The registry records the baptism date as **November 22, 1835**. The text explicitly notes that the infant was "**ten days old**" at the time of the sacrament. Counting back precisely ten days determines that Anne Beegan's exact date of birth was **November 12, 1835**.

The Clerical Margin Correction

An important clerical error occurs in the left margin. The officiating priest initially began writing the surname of the godparents (*Stewart*) alongside the child's given name. Recognizing his mistake, he drew a bold cross-out strike (X) directly through "Stewart" and neatly recorded the true family surname, **Beegan**, directly underneath.

Surname Orthography and Variants

The record establishes the spelling utilized by the parish priest as **Beegan** (utilizing a double 'e'). In broader Canadian and American civil census databases, this specific family lineage frequently undergoes phonetic spelling shifts, morphing interchangeably between *Began*, *Bigan*, and *Biggins* depending on the literacy and accent of the reporting family member and the recording official.

3. Institutional History: St. Columban's Parish

St. Columban's holds the historical distinction of being the first Roman Catholic parish established in Cornwall, Ontario. While the original wooden chapel structure was completed in 1829 to accommodate a modest congregation of early Highland Scottish Catholic settlers, the socio-economic landscape altered dramatically in the early 1830s.

Between **1834 and 1843**, thousands of Irish immigrant laborers arrived in Eastern Ontario to undertake the massive engineering feat of digging the **Cornwall Canal**—an 11-mile canal system designed to bypass the treacherous Long Sault rapids on the St. Lawrence River. This sudden demographic explosion of devoutly Catholic, working-class Irish families completely transformed the local community, placing immense administrative demands on the Church and necessitating a full-time resident priest to anchor the rapidly expanding frontier parish.

4. Clerical Profile: Father James P. Bennett

The identity of the officiating priest is firmly authenticated by the archival records of the early Upper Canada Catholic dioceses. **The Reverend James P. Bennett** was officially dispatched to Cornwall in late 1834, becoming St. Columban's **very first permanent resident pastor**.

The trailing abbreviation on his signature, "**M. Pt.**", stands for *Missionarius Presbyter* (Latin for Missionary Priest). This designation was standard protocol for clergy operating within vast, unmapped wilderness missions under the expansive jurisdiction of the Bishop of Kingston, prior to the formal establishment of localized, modern diocesan borders.

Archival records from the years directly preceding his arrival in Cornwall (1832–1833) track Father Bennett traveling thousands of miles across the trackless Ontario backcountry, ministering to remote frontier settlements in Peterborough, Downeyville (St. Luke's/Emily), and as far north as Penetanguishene. He routinely braved harsh Canadian winters to celebrate Mass on the dirt floors of early pioneer log shanties.

Local historical annals paint a vivid portrait of Father Bennett's tenure at the Cornwall Canal camps. Described as an otherwise cultured and articulate young man, he possessed an incredibly fierce, commanding physicality required to maintain order among the rough, often volatile shantytowns of the canal diggers. Local histories recount that he frequently rode his horse

directly into rowdy canal camp riots, using a whip to disperse brawling laborers and physically ejecting agitators from local taverns to protect his parish flock.

5. The Migration Arc: PetersPioneers & Illinois

This primary document serves as a vital cross-reference confirming the foundational research compiled by family historian Peter Biggins on the extensive **PetersPioneers** genealogical platform.

The timeline established by this 1835 baptism perfectly aligns with the multi-generational migration path of Patrick and Bridget Beegan's descendants. The infant Anne Beegan would grow up to marry **Patrick Gaffey**. Following the completion of the Canadian canal networks and subsequent economic shifts, this branch migrated westward into the United States.

This exact trajectory is later picked up by the **1880 United States Federal Census for Rogers Township, Ford County, Illinois**, which confirms that the family matriarch, Ann Gaffey, was indeed born in Canada to Irish-born parents during this exact mid-1830s window. This document effectively serves as the definitive bridge connecting their Irish origin to their Canadian settlement and final American home.

Compiled for the historical record and shared lineage preservation of the Beegan-Gaffey-Biggins families. Archival data cross-referenced with the Gabriel Drouin Historical Collections and Upper Canada Catholic Diocesan Logs.